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Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey

The use of media to follow news and current affairs

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^{r} revised
x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E} use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

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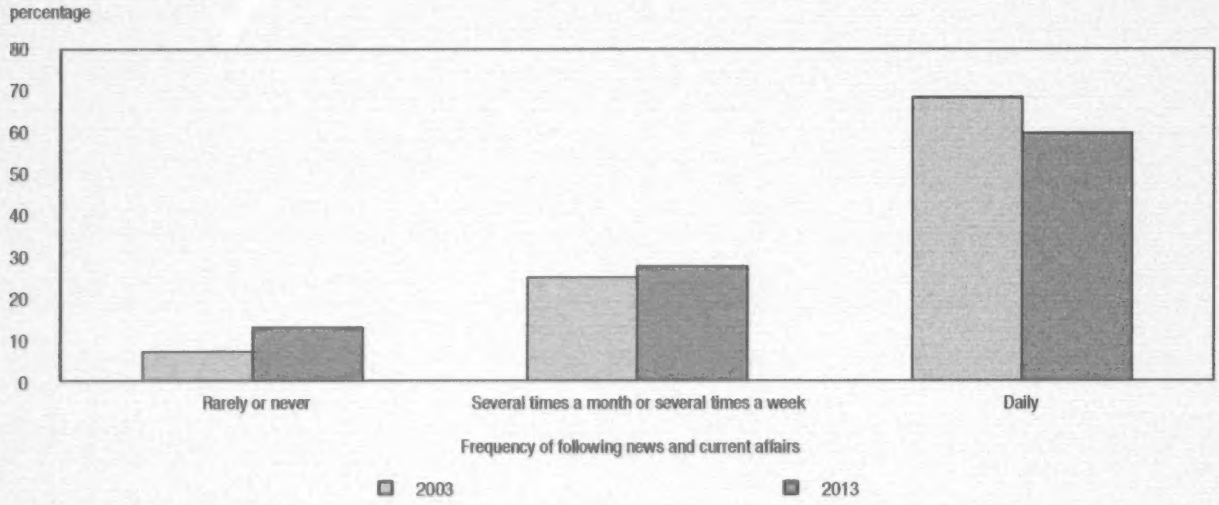
The use of media to follow news and current affairs

The ways Canadians use to get information on political and social issues, and the frequency at which they do so, have changed considerably in the past decade. Moreover, generational gaps have widened in terms of the frequency of consumption and the types of media used. In particular, Canadians are following news and current affairs less frequently than in the past.

The proportion of Canadians who reported following news and current affairs daily declined from 68% in 2003 to 60% in 2013 (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Frequency of following news and current affairs, 2003 and 2013



Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003 and 2013.

In contrast, the proportion of Canadians who stated that they rarely or never followed news and current affairs doubled (7% in 2003, compared with 13% in 2013).

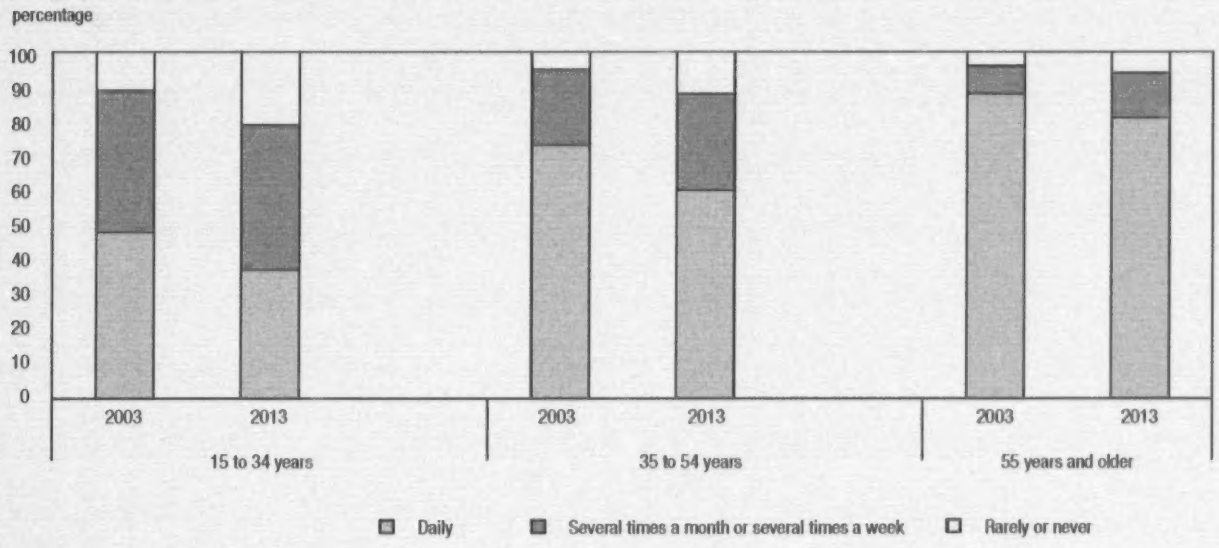
Behind this decline in the frequency at which people follow news and current affairs were significant differences among age groups.

In general, older Canadians are more likely to follow news and current affairs daily. In 2013, 81% of Canadians aged 55 years and older reported following them daily, compared with 37% of Canadians aged 15 to 34 years.

The magnitude of the difference between younger and older Canadians has increased over time, which is attributable to a higher proportion of youth reporting that they rarely or never followed news and current affairs.

The proportion of young people aged 15 to 34, who stated that they rarely or never followed news and current affairs, almost doubled during the period, from 11% in 2003 to 21% in 2013. In comparison, the proportion of Canadians aged 55 and older who said the same rose from 4% to 6% (Chart 2).

Chart 2
Frequency of following news and current affairs, by age group, 2003 and 2013



Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003 and 2013.

At the regional level, the frequency at which people followed news and current affairs decreased in all regions. However, differences between the regions remained.

The highest proportion of people who reported that they followed news and current affairs daily was in Quebec (63%). In contrast, the lowest proportions were observed in Manitoba (55%) and Alberta (53%) (Table 1).

University graduates aged 25 to 54 follow news and current affairs less regularly than people aged 55 and older with less than a high school diploma

People with a higher level of education are more inclined to follow news and current affairs regularly. However, Canadians aged 55 and older, regardless of their level of education, followed news more frequently than other age groups.

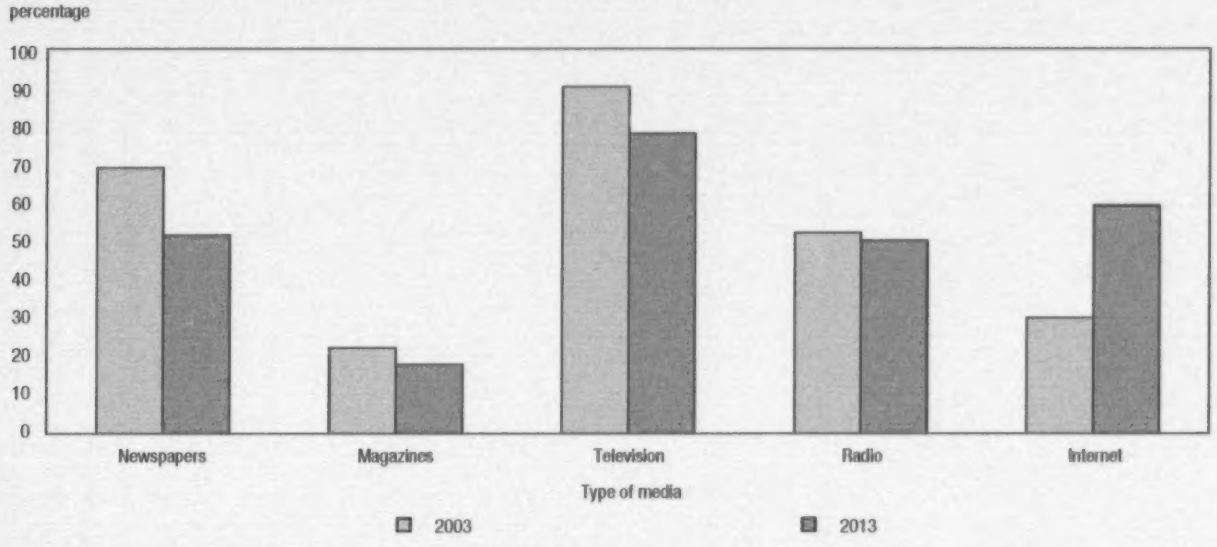
For example, among people aged 55 and older with less than a high school diploma, 79% followed news and current affairs daily. In comparison, 60% of university graduates aged 25 to 54 followed news and current affairs daily.

In terms of trends, the frequency at which people followed news and current affairs declined more rapidly among university graduates aged 25 to 54 than among their older counterparts. For example, the proportion of university graduates aged 25 to 54 who rarely or never followed news and current affairs tripled during the period, from 3% to 9% (Table 1).

The use of newspapers and television is declining considerably

In 2013, as in 2003, television was the type of media used most often by people who followed news and current affairs several times a month or more frequently.[1] However, the proportion of people who reported that they followed news and current affairs on television fell from 90% in 2003 to 78% in 2013 (Chart 3).

Chart 3
Type of media used to follow news and current affairs,[1] 2003 and 2013



1. People who follow news and current affairs several times a month, several times a week or daily.
Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003 and 2013.

In contrast—and not surprisingly—use of the Internet to follow news and current affairs rose significantly, from 30% in 2003 to 59% in 2013. It was the only type of media that posted an increase in use.

Print newspapers are probably the type of media most affected by the changes in Canadians' habits. In 2003, 69% of people who followed news and current affairs at least several times a month read newspapers to get information. A decade later, this proportion was 51%.

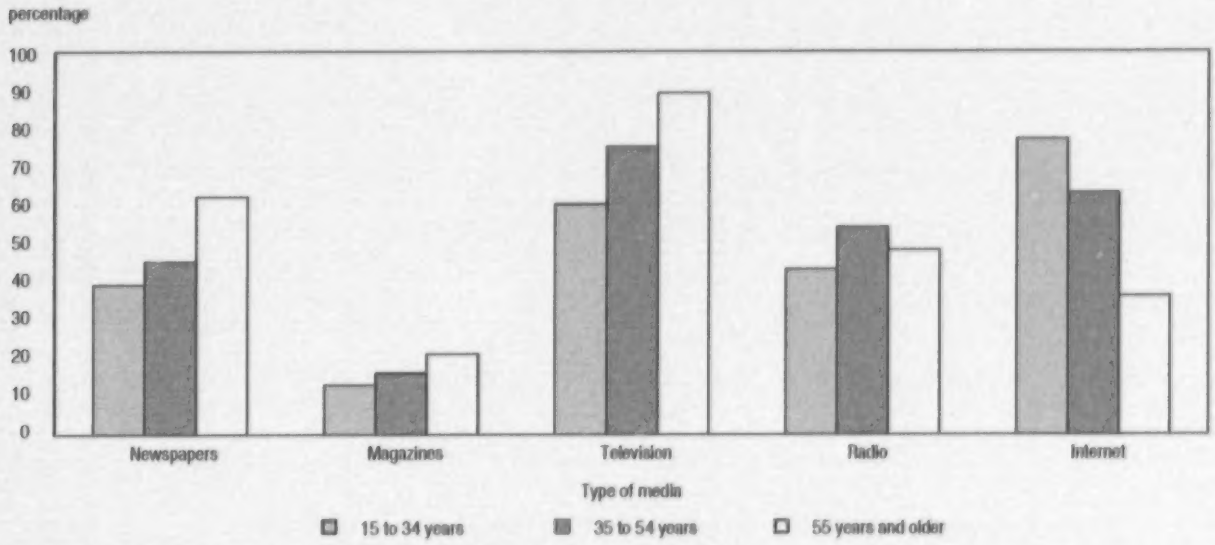
Profile of the users of different types of media

It is important for the media and their advertisers to know the profile of the people using them, given that they depend to a large extent on advertising revenue.

Younger Canadians did not use the same types of media as their older counterparts to get information. In 2013, 77% of 15- to 34-year-olds used the Internet to follow news and current affairs, compared with 36% of people 55 years and older. Older Canadians were considerably more likely to read newspapers and magazines and to watch television (Chart 4).

1. This section, which compares the types of media used in 2003 and 2013, contains information about people who reported that they followed news and current affairs daily, several times a week or several times a month.

Chart 4
Type of media used to follow news and current affairs,[1] by age group, 2013



1. People who follow news and current affairs rarely, several times a month, several times a week or daily.
Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey.

Table 2 shows in greater detail how use of the five types of media differs by age group.

In 2013, seniors 65 years and older accounted for 18% of the population aged 15 and older. However, they were overrepresented among people who read newspapers and magazines and who watched television to stay informed. For instance, of the 13.8 million people who read about news and current affairs in newspapers, about one-quarter were aged 65 and older (24%).

Men use the Internet more often to follow news and current affairs

Men and women have slightly different preferences in the types of media they use to follow news and current affairs. First, women were more likely (19%) than men (15%) to stay informed by reading magazines (Table 3).

Women were also slightly more likely to watch television (77%, compared with 73% of men).

In contrast, 62% of men used the Internet, compared with 55% of women (Table 3).

The highest level of education was also associated to some extent with the type of media used. The most significant differences involved the use of the Internet. While 76% of university graduates followed news and current affairs on the Internet, the same was true for 43% of people whose highest level of education is a high school diploma (Table 3).

In contrast, a higher level of education was linked to less frequent television watching: 82% of people whose highest level of education is a high school diploma watched television to stay informed, compared with 71% of university graduates.

There were also differences among the provinces. In 2013, the provinces with the highest rates of Internet use for following news and current affairs were Alberta (63%), British Columbia and Ontario (61% in both cases). At the other end of the spectrum, 51% of Quebec residents used the Internet.

Radio was used particularly in Prince Edward Island (57%), Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia (55% in both cases). It was used substantially less in British Columbia (43%).

Lastly, the highest proportion of people who watched news and current affairs on television was recorded in Quebec (82%). In comparison, the corresponding proportions were 70% in British Columbia and 69% in Alberta.

About one in four people used one type of media exclusively

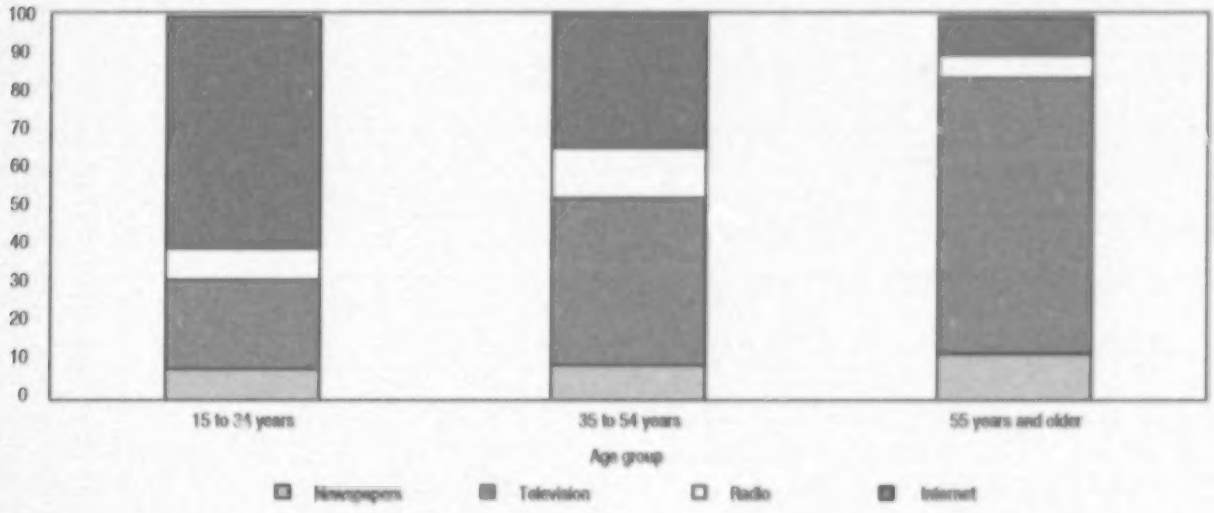
In 2013, about one quarter of Canadians used only one of the five types of media to follow news and current affairs (24%). Among young people aged 15 to 34, this proportion was 30% (Table 4).

At the other extreme, 21% of people used four or even all five of the different types of media. University graduates were most likely to be part of this group (29%, compared with 17% of those whose highest level of education is a high school diploma).

Differences among age groups in the types of media used were found for people who stayed informed using only one type of media. Among young people aged 15 to 34 who used only one medium, 60% used the Internet, compared with 10% of their counterparts in the 55-and-older age group. The Internet is different from the other types of media in that it also allows users to read newspapers, watch television and listen to the radio. However, it was not possible to determine through the survey exactly how people who use the Internet follow news and current affairs.

Among Canadians aged 55 and older, who used only one medium to stay informed, 71% used the television (Chart 5).

Chart 5
Type of media used to follow news and current affairs by people who use only one type of media to stay informed, 2013



Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey.

Frequency of use of the different types of media

As part of the General Social Survey (GSS), respondents were asked to report the frequency at which they used the different types of media to follow news and current affairs.

In a typical week, Canadians who watched television to stay informed did so for an average of six hours. Radio was also used for an average of six hours per week, while the average for Internet users was five hours (Table 5).

The average number of hours devoted to listening to the radio was slightly higher for men (seven hours) than for women (six hours). The same held true for following news and current affairs on the Internet, with five hours among men and four hours among women.

Not only were older Canadians more likely to watch news and current affairs on the television, but they also spent more time doing so, with an average of eight hours per week, compared with three hours per week for those aged 15 to 34.

Regional differences in the average number of hours spent watching television, listening to the radio and using the Internet were generally more modest.

The results for the frequency at which people read newspapers and magazines to stay informed were similar to the more general results for the frequency at which people followed news and current affairs. For example, 60% of Canadians aged 55 and older read newspapers daily, compared with 21% of those aged 15 to 34.

Confidence in the Canadian media

As part of the GSS, respondents were asked the extent to which they had confidence in certain institutions, including the Canadian media.[2] Respondents indicated their level of confidence on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "no confidence at all" and 5 means "a great deal of confidence."

In 2013, less than half of Canadians (40%) indicated that they had confidence in the Canadian media (responses of 4 or 5 on the scale). This was a relatively low proportion compared with the other types of institutions about which respondents were asked. For example, 76% reported having confidence in the police, 63% in local merchants and business people, and 61% in the school system.

The level of confidence in the Canadian media was, however, higher than that in major corporations (30%) and the federal parliament (38%).

Young people were less likely than older Canadians to have confidence in the Canadian media. Some 36% of 15- to 34-year-olds stated that they had confidence in the media, compared with 45% of people aged 55 and older.

Data source

This report is based on data from the 2013 General Social Survey (GSS) on Social Identity and the 2003 GSS on social engagement. The target population consisted of persons aged 15 and older living in Canada's 10 provinces, excluding people living full-time in institutions.

For more information on the data source, please consult the following document:

2013:

http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SurvId=134876&InstaId=139605&SDDS=5024

2003:

http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&Id=5509

2. The GSS question did not refer to any specific type of media or media group. The responses reflect, therefore, general perceptions of the Canadian media.

Table 1
Frequency at which people follow news and current affairs, 2003 and 2013

	Daily		Several times a month or several times a week		Rarely or never	
	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013
	percentage					
Total	68	60†	25	27†	7	13†
Men (ref.)	72	63†	23	25†	6	12†
Women	65†	57*†	27	30*†	8*	14*†
Age group						
15 to 34 years (ref.)	48	35*	41	42	11	21†
35 to 54 years	73*	60*†	22*	28*†	6*	12*†
55 years and older	82*	81*†	8*	13*†	4*	6*†
Province of residence						
Newfoundland and Labrador	70	61†	25	25	6	14†
Prince Edward Island	67	61	23	24	11*	15
Nova Scotia	65*	62	26	24	9*	14†
New Brunswick	64*	56*†	26	26	10*	18*†
Quebec	72*	63†	22*	25†	6	12†
Ontario (ref.)	69	61†	25	27†	7	12†
Manitoba	64*	55*†	27	28	9*	17*†
Saskatchewan	63*	56*†	29*	30	8	14†
Alberta	65*	53*†	27*	32*†	7	15*†
British Columbia	65*	58*†	27*	31*†	7	11†
Level of education (people 25 to 54 years)						
Less than a high school diploma	61*	49†	26	26†	13*	25*†
High school diploma (ref.)	64	52†	28	31†	7	17†
Postsecondary diploma or certificate	67*	54†	27	32†	6*	14*†
University degree	75*	60*†	22*	31†	3*	9*†
Level of education (people 55 years and older)						
Less than a high school diploma	69*	79†	10*	12†	6*	10*†
High school diploma (ref.)	80	81†	6	13†	3	7†
Postsecondary diploma or certificate	89	81†	9	14†	2*	5*†
University degree	93*	84*†	5	13†	2*	3*

E use with caution
* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)
† significantly different from 2003 ($p < 0.05$)
Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2003 and 2013.

Table 2
Percentage of people who follow news and current affairs daily, several times a week, several times a month or rarely, by sex and age group, 2013

	Population 15 years and older	Type of media				
	Total	Newspapers (print)	Magazines (print)	Television	Radio	Internet
	Number of people (in thousands)					
Total	29,132	13,634	4,769	21,101	13,595	16,421
	percentage					
Sex						
Men	49	49	45	48	50	52
Women	51	51	55	52	50	48
Age group						
15 to 24 years	16	12	11	12	12	20
25 to 34 years	17	13	14	14	16	22
35 to 44 years	16	13	15	15	17	19
45 to 54 years	18	16	18	19	21	16
55 to 64 years	16	19	19	16	16	13
65 to 74 years	10	14	14	13	10	6
75 years and older	8	11	10	9	6	2

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey.

Table 3
Type of media used by people who follow news and current affairs daily, several times a week, several times a month or rarely, 2013

	Type of media used				
	Newspapers (print)	Magazines (print)	Television	Radio	Internet
	percentage				
Total	49	17	75	46	66
Men (ref.)	48	15	73	45	62
Women	50	19*	77*	46	69*
Age group					
15 to 24 years (ref.)	39	13	66	42	77
25 to 54 years	45*	16*	70*	54*	63*
55 years and older	62*	21*	83*	43*	50*
Highest level of education (people 25 and older)					
Less than a high school diploma	52	13	80*	41*	54*
High school diploma (ref.)	51	15	82	47	63
Postsecondary diploma or certificate	50	17*	79*	52*	71*
University degree	51	23*	71*	54*	70*
Province of residence					
Newfoundland and Labrador	35*	12*	81*	50*	53*
Prince Edward Island	35*	15	76	57*	55
Nova Scotia	50	14*	72	50*	60*
New Brunswick	50	14*	74	52	53*
Quebec	52*	16*	82*	45	51*
Ontario (ref.)	48	18	74	45	65
Manitoba	54*	16	72	45	50*
Saskatchewan	45	11	73	54*	57*
Alberta	43*	16*	69*	45	63
British Columbia	52*	18	70*	43*	65

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)
Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey

Table 4
Number of types of media used by people who follow news and current affairs daily, several times a week, several times a month or rarely, 2013

	Number of types of media used		
	One	Two or three	Four or five
	percentage		
Total	24	55	21
Men (ref.)	24	55	21
Women	24	55	21
Age group			
15 to 24 years (ref.)	30	52	18
25 to 54 years	23*	56*	20*
55 years and older	20*	57*	23*
Highest level of education (people 25 and older)			
Less than a high school diploma	31*	58	11*
High school diploma (ref.)	25	57	17
Postsecondary diploma or certificate	21*	57	22*
University degree	19*	53*	28*

* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)
Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey

Table 5
Frequency of use of the different types of media to follow news and current affairs, 2012

	Type of media used to follow news and current affairs				
	Television	Radio	Internet	Newspapers (print)	Magazines (print)
	Average number of hours of use in a typical week			Percentage of people who read daily	Percentage of people who read every week
Total	9	6	5	40	21
Men (ref.)	8	7	5	45	19
Women	9	6*	4*	35*	23*
Age group					
15 to 24 years (ref.)	3	5	5	24	20
25 to 54 years	5*	7*	6*	35*	24
55 years and older	4*	4*	3	49*	24*
Highest level of education (people 25 and older)					
Less than a high school diploma	9*	5	4	45	25
High school diploma (ref.)	6	6	5	35	25
Postsecondary diploma or certificate	5*	7*	6	43	25
University degree	3*	6*	5	45	22*
Province of residence					
Newfoundland and Labrador	6*	7*	6	37*	25*
Prince Edward Island	5	6	6	34*	25*
Nova Scotia	5*	6*	5	36*	24
New Brunswick	6*	6	6	37*	25
Quebec	6*	6	5	42	25
Ontario (ref.)	5	6	5	44	25
Manitoba	5	6	6	39*	22*
Saskatchewan	5	7*	5	37*	25
Alberta	5*	7	6*	37*	21*
British Columbia	6	6	6*	37*	25

... use with caution
* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)
Source: Statistics Canada, 2012 General Social Survey